



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
17TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

February 7, 2012

Testimony by Representative Barbara L. Toles
To the Assembly Committee on Transportation
In support of Assembly Bill 280 -- Individual Income Tax Exemption for
Employer-paid Transit Expenses

Good morning Chairman Petrowski and members of the Assembly
Committee on Transportation.

I'm pleased to testify before you today in support of my proposal, Assembly
Bill 280 (AB 280), which provides an individual income tax exemption for
the cost of an employer-provided public transportation pass.

This bill recognizes the fact that in order to put Wisconsinites back to work,
they first have to be able to *get* to work. Labor mobility is essential to a
healthy economy, and public transportation plays a critical role in providing
access to workplaces that would otherwise be inaccessible to the people who
do not own a car, or who can no longer afford to drive due to high gas prices
or long-term unemployment.

Unfortunately, despite the necessity of affordable public transportation to
our state's economic development, transit funding has been one of the first
things to be cut by state and local governments facing tough budgetary
choices. This year, aid to transit systems statewide was cut by 10%, which
has resulted in a mix of route reductions and fare hikes, both of which place
the burden of these funding cuts on the people who can least afford it—those
who rely on public transportation to get to work—and makes it that much
harder for the economy to match workers with potential employers.

I recently toured BuySeasons, Inc., in New Berlin, which is expanding and
has seasonal job openings, but these jobs would be largely inaccessible to
someone living in my community without affordable public transportation.

AB 280 is a win-win for workers and employers. It helps workers who are working and not making a lot of money, with the rising costs of their commute. By providing an individual income tax exemption for employer-provided transit expenses, we are supporting workers while ensuring that the costs of recent transit funding cuts are shared by everyone. We all benefit when people who need a job can find one, and when employers know that their growth will not be limited by their employees' inability to access the workplace.

I hope that you will all agree that AB 280 provides a targeted, cost-effective solution to rising transit costs, and will ultimately help sustain the public transportation system that is an essential component of economic growth in many of our state's largest communities.